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ABSTRACT

Two kinds of efforts at instructional improvement in higher education, student evaluation of teachers and faculty development programs on campuses, fall short of reaching their theoretical goals. Student evaluations are neither reliable nor valid measures of a teacher's instructional effectiveness. Some of the items included in such questionnaires address only symptoms of instructional problems and not underlying causes, and others ignore the fact that learning and not teacher characteristics is the most important objective. Similarly, almost anything that a faculty member does outside the classroom is now called faculty development, but in this melange, most development programs have little potential for contributing significantly to instructional improvement. Two projects have been developed using a rigorous and systematic approach to this problem: the Center for Professional Development with pilot programs on six campuses of the California State University and Colleges; and a comprehensive program at the UCLA School of Dentistry. In the multicampus project, a variety of efforts were undertaken on different campuses: narrowly-focused faculty workshops, development of self-appraisal instruments, course and curricular materials development, institutional research projects, and a program for administrators only. It is felt that little change occurred or was initiated in this project. At UCLA, however, a nonfragmented, comprehensive faculty development and instructional improvement program addressing institutional goals is felt to be a success. The key is that the school as an organization, including both faculty and administration, accepted responsibility for the consequences of its educational programs. (MSE)

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THE PATHWAYS AND PITFALLS TO INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT

by

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Student evaluations are neither reliable nor valid measures of a teacher's instructional effectiveness, and they cannot be used either to evaluate faculty or to improve instruction. Now that I have made that blasphemous statement, let me clarify what I mean.

Student evaluation systems were developed in the late 1960s primarily to placate angry students who demanded more direct input into the educational system. In that sense, student ratings filled an important void in higher education -- they provided the opportunity for students to express their opinions about their teachers and their courses and acknowledged the importance of client satisfaction. Even more important, student evaluation systems brought renewed attention to the importance of teaching, an unbelievably neglected aspect of higher education for far too long. But, to suggest that student ratings are an effective aid for improving instruction is akin to suggesting that fans' cheers and expletives can be used to improve the quality of a baseball game. Only someone convinced that killing umpires was the key to winning games would make that assertion.

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One has only to look at the items typical of rating systems to understand the problem. One example, is the item "Did the professor stimulate the students to high intellectual effort?" How can being given a low rating on this item help you detect why you didn't and how you could do so in the future? Conversely, how

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can a high rating help identify the magic formula so that it can be repeated?

Another item commonly used on student rating forms is the one that asks "Did the professor speak with expressiveness and variety of tone of voice?" Again, while a high rating might encourage you to enroll in Columbia Broadcasting School, it tells you nothing about whether the students learned as a result of your mellifluous tones. And isn't that what instructional improvement is all about -- increasing the probability that students are learning as a result of their spending 15-20 hours each week in class?

My second bit of heresy concerns the contribution of so-called "faculty development" programs to campus-wide instructional improvement. The melange of activities that are called faculty development is staggering -- research projects, sabbaticals, conferences, lectures, seminars, exchange programs, growth contracts, instructional design projects, bag lunches and workshops of every type and variety. Almost anything a faculty member does these days (<u>outside of class</u>, that is) is called faculty development. But, regardless of the type of activity, most faculty development programs have little potential of making a significant contribution to improving the quality of instruction in higher education.

The reasons for the impotence of these programs are very simple. First, few faculty development programs mandate faculty participation. Although sanctioned by the administration, most programs maintain a relatively low profile quite deliberately.

The assumption is that a strong, campus-wide appeal for faculty to further develop their professional competencies such as improving their instruction might be viewed as a personal insult. Because few faculty are willing to acknowledge inadequacies in their instructional competence, more seductive tactics must be used to cajole them into some type of development activity. Voluntary programs notoriously attract those faculty who are most open to improvement - and in the majority of cases, that means the already competent teacher. While even the best teachers can benefit from instructional improvement programs, the ones who really need a rigorous program of development do not participate and yet they are the ones who must do so if major improvements are to be made in the quality of an institution's instructional program.

A second factor that limits the potential of faculty development programs to bring about significant instructional improvement is that few of these programs are designed systematically on the basis of the goals of the college, the departments and the related teaching needs of the faculty. Some programs exist in limbo because they were established as tokens of a current fad. After all, what college these days could admit with grace to the lack of a faculty development program? Other programs are established so that the college can obtain a share of the foundation and Federal monies so temptingly offered in the name of faculty development. In few such cases is the desire to increase faculty's teaching effectiveness a genuine concern.

But, even in the case of good intentions and the purest of motives, many faculty development programs are conceived in

isolation from the rest of the institution. The assumption is that the mere existence of a Faculty Program will somehow diffuse and affect all of the other components in the institutional system. These program planners ignore the fact that their college is a complex organization composed of interrelated and continuously interacting people, processes and purposes. If it is to be effective, a program for instructional improvement must be specially designed and integrated into the organizational system and it must be compatible with the goals and needs of that system.

Finally, most faculty development programs, particularly those which are composed of a potpourri of workshops, focus on process -- not outcomes. As such, they are susceptible to an early demise. Once the range of "saleable" workshop topics has been exhausted, the program fades into oblivion. And oblivion may well be beneficial, certainly as far as instructional improvement is concerned. Devotees of "process" programs cleave stubbornly to the importance of the classroom environment, the particular instructional methods used (lecture is a bad; discussion is a good) and the way in which the faculty member perceives his/her role as a teacher. No evidence has yet been found to relate any of these variables to student learning. Research has shown over and over again that different teachers using different instructional techniques in different class settings can be equally effective in bringing about student learning with different types of students. Some students learn better from the lecture method; others require the interaction of a discussion mode. Some students respond to an authoritarian teaching style; others to a

permissive one. And to confuse the issue even further, what some students' view as exciting, others view as dull. There is simply no single teacher trait or action that has proven to be associated with student achievement.

Does all of this mean that viable campus-wide instructional improvement is impossible? Not at all. What it does mean is that a rigorous instructional improvement program must be carefully and systematically planned. For optimum results, it must be designed as a campus-wide program based on a careful assessment of institutional and faculty needs. The link between faculty development and instructional improvement cannot be assumed ipso facto. Let me give you two examples to illustrate.

The first example is the Center for Professional Development which was established in the Chancellor's Office of the California State University and Colleges, in Summer 1974. The Center was funded by the Chancellor's Office and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, otherwise known as FIPSE or "The Fund", at approximately $.5 million over a three-year period. The purpose of the Center was to promote faculty development in the hopes of improving instruction and the quality of education on the nineteen campuses in the system. Six campuses were selected to develop and test different kinds of pilot programs. The six campuses ranged from a small, relatively isolated college with 129 faculty and 3,500 students to a large, metropolitan university with 900 faculty serving over 26,000 students. It was hoped that definitive guidelines could be developed for other

colleges and universities concerning which kinds of programs (or program elements) worked best in which ways on what kinds of campuses.

Two campus programs consisted primarily of assorted workshops for small groups of faculty based on a narrowly-focused needs assessment of consumers, that is, a survey of what kinds of topics faculty were interested in hearing about. No assessment of either institutional goals or student learning was undertaken, and, as a result, no strategy for relating the program to instructional improvement could be developed.

Attendance at workshops during the first year was excellent on both campuses. Seventy-five percent of the faculty on one campus and over 60% on the other participated in a series of workshops on Piagetian theory, computer-assisted instruction, experiential learning, testing and grading and proposal writing. By the end of the first year, there were no more "new" topics to motivate the faculty's interest. Only a handful of faculty attended the remaining sessions.

A third campus program consisted of the development of diagnostic self-appraisal instruments for faculty to use to assess their teaching capabilities and effectiveness. Resource units that corresponded to the various dimensions of the instruments were also developed purportedly to help faculty improve or supplement the teaching skill deficiencies they had identified. The project staff compiled an extensive number of items and categorized and coded them to form item pools from which self-appraisal

forms could be developed by individual faculty. An equally extensive array of self-instructional materials were developed on topics such as the lecture method, discussion formats, grading problems, etc.

Again, however, the needs assessment which formed the base of the project, although conducted somewhat more systematically, concentrated on the faculty, not on institutional needs or the problems associated with student learning. Even more strange, despite the fact that in the needs assessment survey, the faculty overwhelmingly endorsed the idea and indicated their desire to use the self-evaluation instruments, very few were willing to do so once they were developed. Some departments refused to cooperate at all. It is highly doubtful that this project will have any lasting impact on either the university or the handful of faculty who participated.

A fourth campus focused on a mini-grant program for faculty to develop course and curricular materials. The problem with this program was simply that, like most mini-grant programs for faculty-initiated projects, the products were of questionable instructional value. Most faculty are simply not trained to develop and evaluate high quality instructional materials. As a result, while mini-grants might serve as motivating forces for faculty to examine their teaching, without assistance from instructional design specialists, they rarely make any meaningful change in instructional practices.

An academically elite Institute was the focal point for the faculty development program instituted at another campus. The

Institute was composed of and directed by a group of 14 departmentally-nominated and presidentially-appointed faculty who met regularly each week to report on carefully planned institutional research projects relating to many aspects of teaching and learning on that campus. In addition, the Institute sponsored one-day and weekly seminar programs for the faculty at-large, informal departmental and school "gatherings" and system-wide conferences.

Although this program also was not based on a comprehensive institutional analysis, it was in large measure planned to deal with acknowledged concerns of students and faculty alike - particularly that the quality of education on the campus was suffering from a pervasive lack of collegiality and sense of common purpose. The program was at least directed toward a defined institutional need rather than at a series of "interesting topics".

An entirely different type of program was designed solely for administrators at the sixth campus and for the most part resulted from a conscientious institutional self-study and a university-wide commitment to professional development and teaching improvement. This project consisted of a seminar program for department chairs and school deans which focused on the professional responsibilities of administrators and their specific role and objectives as managers and facilitators. Approximately 95 percent of the deans and department chairs participated in the program, and many institutional policies and practices affecting both students and faculty have changed in a positive direction as a direct result of this program.

All of the campus staffs on each of the six campuses were dedicated and worked very hard to make their projects successful. The Center staff was equally committed to the program. Yet, despite the vast amounts of money, time and energy invested in these projects, with the possible exception of the last two programs described, it is unlikely that any broad based institutional change, in either programs or policies, has taken or will ever take place.

Now let me give you another example -- that of a systematically planned, comprehensive program of instructional improvement and faculty development. This program was developed at the UCLA School of Dentistry but it is applicable to all institutions of higher education. Four primary assumptions provided the foundation for the program: 1) that the responsibility for faculty development and instructional improvement rests with the institution or system as a whole; 2) that the goal of faculty development is the improvement of teaching and learning; 3) that significant improvement in the teaching-learning process must be based upon rigorous, comprehensive institution-wide evaluation; and 4) that evaluation must focus on outcomes -- outcomes in terms of faculty motivation, development and satisfaction; the responsiveness of course offerings and curricular sequencing to students needs and professional requirements; and most importantly, outcomes in terms of student learning and development.

The first steps in the project were to systematically develop measurable goals for the School to replace the catalogue-type broad mission statements that existed at the time, and to involve faculty

directly and deeply in the project from the beginning. First, we began working with a sub-committee of a regular standing curricular committee which included one member from each of the three major curricular divisions in the school, a representative of the student body and a member of the administration. Each member solicited general ideas from the faculty and students and drew up a tentative list of issues, directions and concerns which formed the basis for the school's first-order goals. The goals were then sent back to the entire faculty and a 25 percent sample of students for review. Based upon their revisions and suggestions, the goals were refined, converted into measurable objectives, resubmitted to the faculty and after another round of revision and review, were accepted. Similar procedures were then used to establish goals for each of the 14 sections within the school.

Over 90 percent of the faculty and more than 60 percent of the students participated in developing the goals, and, as a result, became increasingly enthusiastic with the whole project. As the faculty clarified more explicitly what they wanted to teach in order to write their obectives, they began to question their effectiveness and wanted to improve their current teaching skills as well as to add a broader range of teaching methods to their repetoire.

Also as a result of defining section goals and developing indices of their attainment, the faculty came to realize that student complaints about their evaluation procedures were justified. While few faculty quibbled with the notion that their main purpose for being in the classroom was to bring about student learning,

when it came down to examining their instruction for the purpose of improvement, not many of them used student outcomes as the criterion of effectiveness. In many areas, faculty had no definitive criteria for student performance. At the same time, they expected students to perform "up to standard" without realizing that they had not established what that standard was. This awareness led the faculty to ask for assistance in developing appropriate tests and criteria for evaluating their teaching effectiveness and their students' performance. This need in turn led to a series of quarter long programs on evaluation, test construction, individualized instruction, student learning styles and multi-method approaches to teaching. The faculty were so enthusiastic that the administration designated one-half day each week as "Faculty Development Day". No courses were held and all laboratories were closed so that all faculty were free to attend the variety of programs offered. The point is not that so many faculty participated or that they were so enthusiastic, but that the faculty development and other subsequent programs were a direct result of institutional self-analysis and were therefore directly related to the needs of the institution and the needs of the faculty with respect to the institutional goals.

Another offshoot of the project was that several faculty began working with us on the development of self-instructional modules. In fact, one entire section will be completely modularized by the end of the next academic year. This, too, had an impact on the School and formed the basis for another series of faculty seminars.

As word spread about the achievement and satisfaction of the students who used the newly developed materials, other faculty wanted to develop modules for their courses.

In order to establish the continuing cycle of evaluation and feedback, as required in the program plan, a survey of graduates was conducted to determine their actual post-graduation knowledge and behavior relevant to each of the goals which had been established. The results of the survey were used to evaluate and modify the goals themselves and yearly graduate surveys provide a base for on-going revision of goals, curricula and instructional programs. The cycle of change and renewal will continue and no doubt, additional programs needed by faculty and administrators will be identified.

An all-encompassing, institutional process of improvement has been generated that includes elements of what some people differentiate as faculty development, instructional improvement, curricular development and organizational development. We see these elements as integrally connected parts of a total improvement program. All aspects of the process are evaluated in terms of their contribution to students' personal development and academic achievements. Because this process has been institutionalized throughout the school, improvement in the quality of the education provided has been significant, if not monumental.

The key is that the school as an organization accepted responsibility for the consequences of its educational programs. Faculty and chairmen accepted responsibility for the results of their departmental programs and finally, faculty as individuals accepted responsibility for the consequences of their instruction.

Collective responsibility for the consequences of instructional programs and evaluation in terms of student outcomes are the two essential ingredients for building the road to instructional improvement.